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SUBJECT: COMMUNISTS' PORTRAYAL OF THEIR CURRENT OFFENSIVE IN SOUTH VIET-NAM

1. AT PARIS MEETINGS AND ELSEWHERE, VIETNAMESE COMMUNISTS HAVE BEEN MAKING CONSIDERABLE EFFORTS TO JUSTIFY THEIR CURRENT WINTER-SPRING OFFENSIVE IN SOUTH VIET-NAM AS NOTHING MORE THAN APPROPRIATE RESPONSE TO WHAT THEY TERM "STEPPED-UP" MILITARY ACTIVITY IN RECENT WEEKS BY SOUTH VIETNAMESE, US AND OTHER ALLIED FORCES. THIS DISINGENUOUS PROPAGANDA LINE DISTORTS THE FACTS AND APPEARS DESIGNED BOTH TO SHIFT ONUS FOR INCREASED LEVEL OF FIGHTING FROM ENEMY TO US AND TO VEIL ENEMY'S OWN OBJECTIVES. ACCORDINGLY, DEPT HAS PREPARED FOLLOWING SUMMARY OF ENEMY'S OFFENSIVE TO DATE, EXTENT OF HIS PREPARATIONS THEREFOR, AND ESTIMATE OF HIS LIKELY OBJECTIVES, WHICH MAY BE DRAWN UPON IN PRIVATE DISCUSSIONS WITH HOST-GOVT OFFICIALS, OTHER CONTACTS AND LOCAL PRESS AT POST'S DISCRETION.

2. NATURE OF POST-TET OFFENSIVE TO DATE. VIETNAMESE COMMUNISTS KICKED OFF NEW ROUND OF OFFENSIVE ACTIVITY IN EARLY MORNING HOURS OF FEBRUARY 23, JUST AS PRESIDENT NIXON WAS PREPARING TO DEPART ON EUROPEAN TRIP. BY WAITING UNTIL SEVENTH DAY OF NEW LUNAR YEAR AND END OF THEIR OWN TET TRUCE, COMMUNISTS AVOIDED STIGMA OF VIOLATING MOST IMPORTANT VIETNAMESE HOLIDAY WHICH HAD ATTACHED TO THEIR TET OFFENSIVE A YEAR AGO. OFFENSIVE HAS BEEN CHARACTERIZED SO FAR BY WIDESPREAD AND WELL-COORDINATED

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ATTACK-BY-FIRE (ABF'S) AGAINST US AND VIETNAMESE MILITARY INSTALLATIONS AND AGAINST POPULATION CENTERS (INCLUDING MAJOR CITIES OF SAIGON, DANANG, HUE, BIEN HOA, MY THO AND NUMBEROUS SMALLER PROVINCE AND DISTRICT CAPITALS). IN RELATIVELY FEW INSTANCES HAS ENEMY ATTEMPTED FOLLOW-UP GROUND ATTACKS AGAINST THESE TARGETS, AND EVEN WHERE HE HAS (E.G., BIEN HOA) ENEMY HAS EXERCISED NOTABLE ECONOMY-OF-FORCE BY WITHHOLDING MAJORITY OF COMBAT UNITS HE HAD PREVIOUSLY POSITIONED WITHIN STRIKING DISTANCE. INTENSITY OF ENEMY ACTIVITY WAS GREATEST DURING FINAL DAYS OF FEBRUARY, BUT ABF'S AND OTHER ENEMY-INITIATED INCIDENTS HAVE CONTINUED INTO MARCH AT LEVELS CONSIDERABLY ABOVE THOSE OF PREVIOUS THREE OR FOUR MONTHS. SAIGON HAS SO FAR BEEN SHELLED FOUR TIMES: TWICE ON FEBRUARY 23, AGAIN ON MARCH 3, AND MOST RECENTLY - AND WITH HEAVIEST CASUALTIES -- ON MARCH 6. NATION-WIDE, 641 CIVILIANS WERE KILLED DURING THE PERIOD FEBRUARY 23 THROUGH MARCY 7. CURRENT LEVEL OF ENEMY ACTIVITY AND STATE OF PREPARATIONS SUGGEST STRONGLY THAT THIS OFFENSIVE WILL BE CONTINUED IN PHASES, WILL LAST AT LEAST THROUGH END OF MARCH, AND WILL BE STAGGERED GEOGRAPHICALLY IN ATTEMPT TO UNBALANCE ALLIED DEFENSIVE AND PRE-EMPTIVE MEASURES (E.G., ABF'S AT OUTSET WERE MOST NUMEROUS IN I AND III CORPS AREAS; AS ACTION ABATED SOMEWHAT IN THOSE AREAS, IT PICKED UP IN HIGHLANDS OF WESTERN II CORPS).

3. RESULTS OF OFFENSIVE TO DATE. ENEMY HAS ACHIEVED SCANT MILITARY SUCCESS SO FAR. ALTHOUGH US CASUALTIES WEEK OF FEBRUARY 23 - MARCH 1 WERE GREATEST OF ANY WEEK SINCE ENEMY'S MAY OFFENSIVE LAST YEAR, ENEMY HAS FAILED TO ACHIEVE THE WIDE-SPREAD DESTRUCTION IN URBAN AREAS OR SIGNIFICANT DISRUPTION OF VIETNAMESE GOVT (GVN) FUNCTIONS AND OF PACIFICATION PROGRAM THAT RESULTED FROM 1968 TET AND MAY-JUNE OFFENSIVES. REFUGEES GENERATED BY THIS OFFENSIVE, FOR EXAMPLE, SO FAR TOTAL FEWER THAN 25,000, VERSUS 750,000 AT PEAK ONE YEAR AGO. ACCORDING TO US ESTIMATES, PACIFICATION PROGRAM HAS BEEN SET BACK SIGNIFICANTLY IN ONLY ONE PROVINCE AND SLIGHTLY IN THREE OTHERS; IN FOUR PROVINCES PACIFICATION MOMENTUM HAS BEEN BLUNTED, AND IN REMAINING 35 PROVINCES PACIFICATION IS LARGELY UNAFFECTED.

4. THRUST OF ENMY JUSTIFICATION. ENEMY HAS CONTENDED AT PARIS MEETINGS AND THROUGH PROPAGANDA MEDIA THAT THIS NEW OFFENSIVE REPRESENTS NO RPL MO MORE THAN APPROPRIATE "PUNISHMENT" IN RESPONSE TO ALLIED MILITARY MEASURES OF RECENT WEEKS. NORTH

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VIETNAMESE FOREIGN MINISTRY ISSUED OFFICIAL STATEMENT TO THIS EFFECT FEBRUARY 26. NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (NLF) CHIEF DELEGATE TRAN BUU KIEM AT FEBRUARY 27 PARIS MEETING "RECALLED THAT SINCE NIXON TOOK HIS OFFICE ON JANUARY 20, AIR AND GROUND OPERATIONS BY THE US AND ITS PUPPETS IN SVN HAD BEEN GREATLY STEPPED UP. DURING A RECENT 12-DAY PERIOD US B-52 STRATEGIC BOMBERS DUMPED ON AREAS AROUND SAIGON 17,000 TONS OF BOMBS -- A RECORD HITHERTO FOR SUCH A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME AND SUCH A SMALL REGION." COMMUNISTS HAVE ALSO ACCUSED US OF BRINGING IN ADDITIONAL "SATELLITE TROOPS" AS "CANNONFODDER" (REFERRING TO MID-FEBRUARY ARRIVAL OF FINAL CONTINGENT OF 11,000-THAI DIVISION WHICH WAS PROGRAMMED WELL OVER A YEAR AGO) AND OF "STRENGTHENING THE SAIGON PUPPET ARMY IN EQUIPMENT AND NUMBERS." ALSO, COMMUNISTS HAVE STRENUOUSLY DENIED EXISTENCE OF UNDERSTANDINGS REACHED LAST FALL BETWEEN US AND NORTH VIET-NAM IN CONNECTION WITH TOTAL HALT OF US BOMBING OVER THE NORTH AND STIPULATION PUBLICLY ENUNCIATED AT THAT TIME THAT PRODUCTIVE PEACE TALKS COULD NOT RPT NOT PROCEED IF COMMUNISTS VIOLATED DEMILITARIZED ZONE (DMZ) OR ATTACKED MAJOR CITIES. IN COMMUNIST LOGIC, DENIAL OF EXISTENCE OF UNDERSTANDINGS MEANS PRESENT ATTACKS CONSTITUTE NO RPT NO VIOLATION OF THOSE UNDERSTANDINGS. (THIS PROPAGANDA THEME OF "PUNISHING" US HAS BEEN EMPLOYED IN PAST; 1968 TET OFFENSIVE, PLANNING FOR WHICH HAD CLEARLY BEGUN MONTHS IN ADVANCE, WAS PRESENTED AS "PUNISHMENT" OF US FOR ALLEGED VIOLATIONS OF ENEMY'S TET TRUCE, WHICH WAS ONLY A FEW HOURS OLD WHEN OFFENSIVE BEGAN. WE WERE SIMILARLY ACCUSED OF VIOLATING ENEMY'S TET TRUCE THIS YEAR, FEBRUARY 15-22, BUT THIS THEME HAS BEEN SUBORDINATED TO THEME OF "PUNISHMENT" FOR "STEPPED-UP" MILITARY OPERATIONS.)

5. ACTUAL MILITARY SITUATION. FACTS OF SITUATION ARE OF COURSE QUITE DIFFERENT:

A. COMMUNIST PREPARATIONS. NATURE AND EXTENT OF COMMUNIST PREPARATIONS FOR THIS OFFENSIVE BELIE ANY SUGGESTION THAT IT WAS MOUNTED ONLY AS QUICK RESPONSE TO ALLIEF INITIATIVES. FIRST, "FALL-WINTER" AND "WINTER-SPRING" MILITARY CAMPAIGNS HAVE BEEN TRADITIONAL FOR ENEMY SINCE EARLY 1960'S. SECOND, RELATIVELY LOW LEVELS OF ENEMY MILITARY ACTIVITY THAT PREVAILED FROM LAST AUTUMN UNTIL
START OF CURRENT OFFENSIVE RESULTED NOT FROM CHOICE BUT FROM ENEMY'S VERY REAL NECESSITY TO REGROUP, RESUPPLY AND RETRAIN HIS UNITS AFTER EXTENSIVE AND COSTLY SERIES OF OFFENSIVES HE

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UNDERTOOK THREE TIMES DURING 1968 (TET, MAY-JUNE, AND AUGUST-SEPTEMBER.)
THIRD, NUMEROUS LARGE CACHES OF WEAPONS, FOOD, ETC., DISCOVERED BY FRIENDLY FORCES SINCE LATE LAST YEAR TESTIFY TO ENEMY'S CAREFUL PREPOSITIONING OF SUPPLIES FOR INTENDED OFFENSIVE ACTION.
FOURTH, ENEMY HAS APPARENTLY CONTINUED TO INFILTRATE FRESH PERSONNEL INTO SVN AT A HIGH RATE, SUGGESTING THAT HE IS NOT ONLY ALLOWING FOR ANTICIPATED LOSSES AS RESULT OF CURRENT OFFENSIVE BUT ALSO PLANNING TO STRENGTHEN HIS FORCE STRUCTURE IN SVN. FINALLY, ENEMY'S PUBLIC
STATEMENTS HAVE FOR SEVERAL MONTHS EXHORTED HIS TROOPS TO NEW OFFENSIVE ACTION, AND CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS CAPTURED FROM HIM OVER LAST FIVE MONTHS HAVE REVEALED ATTACK PLANS, OFTEN WITH ONLY "EXECUTE" DATE LACKING AND PRESUMABLY TO BE PROVIDED AT LAST MINUTE. (PRISONERS TAKEN DURING CURRENT OFFENSIVE HAVE CONFIRMED EXTENSIVE ADVANCE PLANNING AND PREPARATIONS BY THEIR UNITS.) INTERESTING EXAMPLE OF HORTATORY PROPAGANDA WAS ARTICLE BROADCAST BY NLF'S CLANDESTINE LIBERATION RADIO ON JANUARY 3 AND SIGNED BY "NAM HAI," RELATIVELY NEW COVER NAME APPARENTLY BEING USED BY ONE OF SENIOR OFFICERS OF CENTRAL OFFICE FOR SVN (COSVN), RANKING COMMUNIST HEADQUARTERS IN THE SOUTH. ARTICLE COMMENTS ON LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM "SUCCESSES" OF 1968 AND MAKES THESE POINTS, AMONG OTHERS, ABOUT FUTURE OPERATIONS:
"MILITARY ATTACKS MUST AIM AT ANNIHILATING AS MANY ENEMY TROOPS, AS MANY ENEMY WAR MEANS, AND AS MANY LOGISTIC BASES AS POSSIBLE, FULFILLING THEIR ROLE AS A LEVER FOR POLITICAL ATTACKS AND CREATING FAVORABLE CONDITIONS FOR MILITARY PROSELYTIZING.
...IT IS NECESSARY TO LAUNCH ATTACKS SIMULTANEOUSLY ON ALL BATTLEFIELDS AND CLOSELY CONNECT THE THREE STRATEGIC REGIONS (RURAL AREAS, MOUNTAINOUS AREAS, AND CITIES)..." ILLUSTRATIVE ENEMY DOCUMENT IS "DIRECTIVE NUMBER FOUR" ISSUED BY VIET CONG SAIGON CITY COMMITTEE ON JANUARY 21, WHICH CALLED FOR POLITICAL OPERATIONS COORDINATED WITH CURRENT MILITARY OFFENSIVE AS FOLLOWS: PERIOD FEBRUARY 9-23 WAS TO MARK "OPENING OF GREAT WAVE OF POLITICAL AND MILITARY PROSELYTIZING"; PERIOD MARCH 11-16 (I.E., AFTER FIRST PHASE OF MILITARY OFFENSIVE) WOULD SEE CONCENTRATED PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN AMONG URBAN POPULATION WITH "PEACE" AS CENTRAL THEME; THEN, DURING PERIOD MARCH 17-25 AFTER "STRUGGLE MOVEMENTS" HAD DEVELOPED, SLOGANS WERE TO BE GUIDED TOWARD DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS WITH NLF, CHANGE IN VEN NEGOTIATING TEAM AT PARIS, AND FORMATION OF A "PEACE CABINET,"

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WITH "PUBLIC OPINION ON PEACE ISSUES TO BE RAISED TO A FEVER PITCH." REPRESENTATIVE PRISONER TESTIMONY IS THAT OF NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY CAPTAIN NGUYEN VAN TUYEN, ACTING COMMANDER OF VIET CONG 72ND BATTALION, CAPTURED FEBRUARY 24 NEAR TAM KY CITY (I CORPS). CAPT TUYEN SAID HE HAD BEEN TOLD BY SUPERIOR ON OR ABOUT FEBRUARY 8 THAT VIET CONG MILITARY REGION 5, SENIOR HEADQUARTERS IN AREA, HAD ISSUED "GENERAL ATTACK ORDER"; OBJECTIVE OF ATTACK WAS TO INFLUENCE PEACE TALKS IN PARIS AND ESPECIALLY TO OBTAIN ACCEPTANCE OF COALITION GOVERNMENT IN SAIGON. AS IN PREVIOUS "MAJOR ATTACKS," COMMUNISTS ALSO HOPED TO INCITE PEOPLE TO OVERTHROW GVN. CAPTAIN TUYEN HIMSELF CLAIMED TO HAVE SPENT MOST OF JANUARY AND FEBRUARY RECONNOITERING TERRAIN NEAR TAM KY AND NOTED THAT IF LATE-FEBRUARY ATTACK ON TAM KY AND SURROUNDING AREA FAILED HIS UNIT WOULD NEED AT LEAST ONE MONTH TO PREPARE FOR "ANOTHER MAJOR OFFENSIVE."

B. ALLIED ACTIVITY. FOR THEIR PART, GVN FORCES AND THEIR ALLIES HAVE UNDERTAKEN NO RPT NO LIMITATION ON NATURE OR SCOPE OF THEIR MILITARY OPERATIONS WITHIN SVN. ALLIED FORCES HAVE BEEN OPERATING IN RECENT WEEKS AT APPROXIMATELY THE LEVELS WHICH PREVAILED THROUGHOUT 1968. CURRENT PATTERN OF OPERATIONS (INCLUDING RECENT CONCENTRATION OF B-52 STRIKES ON ENEMY BASE AND STAGING AREAS NEAR SAIGON) HAS BEEN DICTATED IN LARGE PART BY BUILD-UP OF COMMUNIST MILITARY THREAT AS ENEMY MILITARY UNITS HAVE MOVED TOWARD MAJOR TARGETS. ENEMY SHELLINGS OF SAIGON HAVE CLEARLY VIOLATED ONE OF UNDERSTANDINGS REACHED LAST FALL, AND RECENT ATTACKS ON US FIRE SUPPORT BASES IMMEDIATELY SOUTH OF THE DMZ SUGGEST ENEMY VIOLATION OF UNDERSTANDING REGARDING DMZ AS WELL.

7. IN SHORT, MUCH EVIDENCE OF ENEMY'S ULTIMATE INTENTIONS HAD PILED UP IN THE THREE OR FOUR MONTHS PRECEDING CURRENT OFFENSIVE (AND HAD LED TO CONSIDERABLE PRESS SPECULATION ABOUT ENEMY'S INTENTIONS AS VARIOUS POSSIBLE TARGET DATES -- MID-DECEMBER, JANUARY 1, TET ITSELF -- PASSED WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT INCIDENT). IN FACT, ENEMY'S INTENTIONS AND RANGE OF HIS OPTIONS WERE UNUSUALLY CLEAR, BUT HIS CHOICE AMONG THOSE OPTIONS AND HIS IMPLEMENTATION DATE REMAINED IN DOUBT UNTIL SHORTLY BEFORE OFFENSIVE BEGAN.

8. ENEMY'S POSSIBLE OBJECTIVES. FOREGOING CLEARLY REFUTES SPECIOUS CLAIM THAT ENEMY IS MRELY REACTING IN A DEFENSIVE WAY TO ALLIED MILITARY ACTIVITIES. QUESTION REMAINS OF ENEMY'S ACTUAL OBJECTIVES IN CONDUCTING THIS OFFENSIVE. MUCH PRESS

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SPECULATION IN US HAS CENTERED ON ENEMY'S PRESUMED EFFORT TO "TEST" NEW US ADMINISTRATION AND DETERMINE WHETHER HE CAN WITH IMPUNITY VIOLATE UNDERSTANDINGS REACHED LAST AUTUMN. SOME SPECULATION ADDS THAT
ENEMY MAY BE SEEKING TO "WIPE OUT" OR ERODE THOSE UNDERSTANDINGS AND ACHIEVE NEW CONCESSIONS (E. G., CESSATION OF B-52 OPERATIONS WITHIN SVN) IN RETURN FOR "NEW" UNDERSTANDING THAT MAJOR CITIES WILL NOT BE ATTACKED, OR THAT ENEMY MAY BE TRYING TO DRIVE WEDGE BETWEEN US AND GVN IF SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARE DISSATISFIED WITH US RESPONSE TO THIS OFFENSIVE. WHILE SOME SUCH SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES MAY BE INVOLVED, CURRENT OFFENSIVE IS BASICALLY A LOGICAL IMPLEMENTATION OF ENEMY'S OVER-ALL STRATEGY OF "FIGHTING WHILE NEGOTIATING." ENEMY'S PRIMARY OBJECTIVES INCLUDE
STRENGTHENING OF HIS HAND AT PARIS, BY DEMONSTRATING HIS CONTINUING CAPACITY FOR OFFENSIVE MILITARY ACTION, AND PRESERVING MORALE OF HIS OWN TROOPS AND CADRE, PLUS MORE TRADITIONAL ONES OF INFLICTING HEAVY CASUALTIES ON FRIENDLY FORCES, UNDERMINING POPULAR CONFIDENCE IN ABILITY OF GVN TO PROVIDE SECURITY EVEN IN URBAN AREAS, AND PREVENTING PACIFICATION OF THE COUNTRYSIDE BY THE GVN.
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